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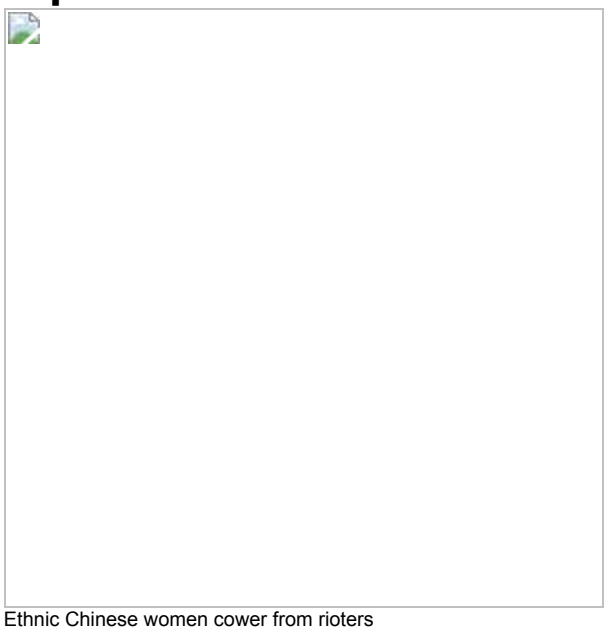
Ethnic Chinese tell of mass rapes



Ethnic Chinese women cower from rioters

Reports are beginning to emerge that hundreds of women and girls of Chinese descent were raped during the riots that swept over Indonesia last month.

The BBC Correspondent Matt Frei reports on the harrowing accounts of rape

As more women and girls - previously too scared to speak - come forward, a disturbing pattern of systematic rape has been revealed.

According to witnesses, the rioters would attack houses, rape the younger women, burn the house, and then move on to the next house. Girls as young as 11 were targeted, and were often raped in front of their families by as many as 10 men.

Ethnic Chinese, who made up only about 3% of Indonesia's population, have traditionally been made into scapegoats. When the rioting broke out in May, many Chinese shops and houses were looted and burned to the ground, and tens of thousands of Chinese fled the country.

The truth comes out

The BBC Jakarta correspondent says that many of the ethnic Chinese are Christian, and it was at church that they first overcame their shame and spoke about what happened.



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As one woman spoke out about her experiences, another stood up and told a similar story, prompting others to do the same.

A terrible realisation dawned on congregations in Jakarta and elsewhere: the Chinese women had become victims of what looked like a campaign of mass rape.

Crisis groups have been set up to help the women, but there are still many unanswered questions, and there has been little official recognition of what happened.

The extent of the violence

It is still not known how many women and girls were raped. Many have already fled from Indonesia, and others are still too traumatised to report it and fear further retaliation.

An ethnic Chinese hotel manager, Lim Sian Tie, said many women tried to hide.

"The trauma is so unbearable, they don't want to see anybody. That is quite understandable. If they are known to have been gang raped they would prefer to commit suicide."

Our correspondent says that many of those who could not flee are still in hospital, their minds scarred and their bodies often horribly mutilated.

A doctor at the hospital said that she knew of at least 400 cases of rape. In one incident 68 Chinese women and girls were raped by groups of as many as 10 men who systematically worked through the floors of an apartment block in a middle-class, residential district.

Unanswered questions

Frequently the women were raped in front of their families and neighbours. One man described how he helped a mother and three daughters escape the country.

"On May 14 my friend's three daughters were put on the back of a truck by a group of men. They were repeatedly raped from four in the afternoon until three in the morning. The youngest was 14."

Our correspondent says the unanswered question haunting the Chinese community, still numb with fear, is who did this?

A number of victims have said that the men who raped them had crew cuts and tattoos and that they seemed to be drugged, or drunk. In the rumour mill of Jakarta, some have pointed to the same renegade units in the army which allegedly encouraged the rioters and looters.

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